

# CSCE NEWS RELEASE

## Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

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# Hungary, Bulgaria and Slovakia Argue for Inclusion in Enlargement

**For Immediate Release**  
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**Washington, DC**—The third in a series of hearings on NATO enlargement was held today by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, focused on the human rights situation in Hungary, Bulgaria and Slovakia as a component for their consideration in the enlargement process. Ambassadors Lichardus of Slovakia, Banlaki of Hungary and Tafrov of Bulgaria were questioned by Co-Chairman Rep. Christopher H. Smith (R-NJ) and Rep. Jon Christensen (R-NE) after each made his opening presentation.

Mr. Smith pointed out in his opening remarks that “as the NATO summit in Madrid nears, I believe it is increasingly important that the United States clarify its position regarding the NATO process for accession by all states which meet the criteria. While those states which qualify should be invited in July to begin negotiation for accession, others need time to implement critical political reforms, or time to allow courageous economic reforms to affect the system. In some cases, the political will to meet the criteria outlined in the NATO Enlargement Facilitation Act of 1996 simply has not been harnessed and demonstrated. The United States, as a leader within NATO, has a responsibility to formulate and enunciate a process so countries which need more time are assured of what prospects lie ahead.

“Without a doubt, Hungary is one of the leading candidates for NATO membership with respect to meeting relevant criteria, including its OSCE human rights commitments. The Hungarians have made tremendous progress in the post-Communist economic transition and lead the region in foreign investment. On the military front, Hungary has cooperated with NATO with respect to Bosnia, providing a staging post at the Taszar base near its border with Croatia. Finally, Hungary has worked to

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improve relations with Romania and Slovakia—two neighbors with substantial Hungarian minorities.”

In his opening remarks, Co-Chairman Smith underscored his commitment to the goal of Slovak integration into Trans-Atlantic institutions, stating that “a strong, democratic Slovakia in the heart of Europe is in the interest of the peoples of both our countries. For that to happen, however, there needs to be credible evidence that meaningful reform is taking root in Slovakia. Unfortunately, it now appears that the progress being made in a number of other Central European countries—the Baltic States, Slovenia, and Romania all come to mind—is simply not being made in Slovakia.” Significantly, Slovak Ambassador Lichardus acknowledged that the reforms necessary to join NATO must come from within Slovakia, saying that future NATO membership “will depend on us.”

Smith also felt that “Bulgaria is currently in the midst of a critical period in its history, but at the same time, a hopeful period. Bulgaria has experienced dramatic change in the last six months. While a severe economic crisis led to massive street protests in January which forced the ex-Communist Bulgarian Socialist Party to give up rule, pre-term elections were held just last month which resulted in a decided victory for the reformist Union of Democratic Forces. The new, reform-minded parliament began work just two weeks ago, and a new government is about to be named—a government which I understand is committed to sweeping economic reform and to joining NATO and the European Union. Bulgaria deserves our support in this difficult transition.”

Ambassador Stefan Tafrov, Ambassador-at-Large of the Republic of Bulgaria for NATO Accession, said “...we expect from the Summit a clear and firm commitment that the Alliance will remain open and that the first invitations are only the beginning of the process which should continue without undue delay. This commitment could find an expression in the establishment of a clearly defined timetable and procedures for further enlargement....Bulgaria looks forward to an early follow-up of the intensified dialogue which should have a pre-accession agenda and focus on the preparation for membership, gradually assuming elements of accession negotiations. The process might involve periodic assessment and relevant guidance on the preparation effort.... This would provide for the enlargement to be a continuous stream process rather than a sequence of ‘waves’ or ‘groups’ of new members.”

Chairman Sen. Alfonse D’Amato (R-NY) said in a prepared statement, “Hungary is universally, and I think, correctly considered to be an automatic candidate for a first round invitation to join NATO. Hungary has met the conditions for membership.” Concerning Bulgaria’s candidacy, he said, “I strongly

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urge the United States and our NATO allies to make certain that there is a clear process for Bulgaria to follow for early NATO membership. I believe that Bulgaria's reform efforts promise change in the right direction, and Bulgaria's new political leaders have the political will and popular support to carry them through to success given enough time and encouragement."

D'Amato continued, "Slovakia is alone among those states that might have been seriously considered for membership in showing problems in the human rights and democratization areas that more than justify waiting to see which direction Slovakia turns—towards democracy, freedom, free enterprise, and integration into European and Western institutions on the basis of shared values and aspirations, or toward ethnically based nationalism and a combination of thinly veiled authoritarianism and statism that is unacceptable to us and our allies.

"Overall, however," he said, "I am personally a supporter of including each of your countries in NATO. I think that Hungary, Bulgaria, and Slovakia should each be included in NATO when each country meets the standards for membership."